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AUTHOR Foltz, Dennis
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ABSTRACT

In home study, testing is the primary method of interacting and exchanging information with students. However, both the testing methods and the administration of most home study examinations are disappointing. The preparation of most examinations is often an afterthought, with little if any attention given to how such exercises might contribute to a student's educational experience. Feedback is important; it should identify errors, postulate the probable cause of the error, and suggest a solution or a way to improve. Personal computers can be used for testing and feedback if their capabilities are exploited to the fullest, rather than just using them to provide number scores. Computers can be used to write good feedback letters that are well worth it in terms of student satisfaction and course completions. Test formats include: essay, true-false, multiple choice, and open book. Multiple-choice, open-book testing may be most suitable for many home study tests. Better testing leads to better teaching and improves the content and process of home study. (KC)

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NHSC OCCASIONAL PAPER NUMBER 3

by
Dennis Foltz, Director of Operations, Gemological Institute of America, Santa Monica, California

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NHSC OCCASIONAL PAPERS are essays intended to stimulate and encourage candid exchanges of ideas between home study professionals.

Introduction

In home study, testing is our primary method of interacting and exchanging information with our students. We use it to measure progress and understanding, to teach, and to coach. It is usually the only communication we have with our students.

Testing is a fundamental process in any educational enterprise; it is the hand maiden of good instruction. Obviously, effective testing lets us evaluate our students' achievement. If we can appraise their performance correctly, we can provide them with feedback which -- if it is well prepared -- is a powerful tool. Without it -- without timely, pointed guidance about the quality of their work, about their strengths and shortcomings, about goals -- our students can neither develop nor improve.

Less apparent is the fact that, without good testing, we cannot evaluate ourselves. If we do it right, testing helps us set, refine, and clarify our objectives -- and then estimate the degree to which we have achieved them.

How Are We Doing?

As one who sincerely believes in home study education (and as a veteran of more accreditation visits than I care to admit), I am disappointed by both the testing methods and the servicing of most home study examinations. The preparation of most exams is done as an afterthought, with little if any attention given to how such exercises might contribute to a student's educational experience.

Many of the exams I have looked at do not test either the course objectives or the student's development. All too often I have seen questions so poorly prepared they can be answered correctly, without reading the text. Repeatedly, I have seen multiple choice questions that simply parrot a sentence in the lesson (often a sentence that was emphasized by being set in boldface or italics). Obviously, verifying the correct answer requires little if any effort on the part of the student.

Rarely do I see context-dependent items in any exams, although in many subjects it is highly desirable to require students to demonstrate their ability to interpret material. Invariably questions are in a text format, no matter what the subject. But many subjects taught via home study could better be tested with different kinds of stimuli -- pictures, graphs, tables, diagrams, filmstrips, tape recordings, and the like.

The Importance of Feedback

While I am disappointed in the caliber of the exams themselves, I am appalled by the many instances of shabby service and lack of feedback. Common sense tells us that it is difficult to improve unless we know how we are doing. If you want to improve your marksmanship, you first have to know how close you're getting to the bullseye. Students have no idea how far off they are unless we tell them.

Tone and manner count, too. Adult learners especially need tactful advice and guidance. They hate to make mistakes. Sympathetic and understanding remarks minimize the anxiety that many adults feel when they take tests.

Obviously, service costs impact our earnings and consequently the tuitions we have to charge. With that in mind, it's not surprising that, almost without exception, exams are prepared to simplify scoring. Schools design their testing to be scored quickly and easily by clerical personnel or scoring machines.

Admittedly, this method of scoring exams and recording scores has many virtues -- I'll discuss some of them later -- but most of us do it primarily because it is fast, accurate, and cost-effective. What I find objectionable in its implementation is the lack of feedback. Typically, incorrect answers are identified and students are given some sort of text reference indicating where they can find the correct answer. Only occasionally do they get any encouragement or acknowledgement. What could be more disheartening, especially if your score was barely passing?

In fact, this rudimentary kind of feedback borders on asking our students to evaluate themselves. If this is what we want, we could really cut costs by skipping quizzes on our lessons and simply giving a proctored exam at the end of a course. True, self-evaluation is important in self-directed learning. But it is not an adequate replacement for sensitive and pertinent reporting of exam results. I believe the typically low level of service directly contributes to the popular perception that home study is really just "self-study."

We owe our students a discussion of their performance. This is a matter of instructional strategy, and there are many sound educational reasons for doing it. First, it provides an occasion to repeat important material -- and repetition is a powerful element in learning. Examination results are an excellent way to reinforce a student's understanding of the material.

Second, while some student errors are the result of poor study habits or sloppy test-taking, most are errors in thinking or understanding. At the very least, a good report should help students improve. It also should clear up any misconceptions and misunderstandings. Finally, it can and should point out learning objectives and stress and reinforce important material.

Feedback on tests, then, should be three-tiered:

- it should identify errors (and, where appropriate, describe the degree of error)
- it should postulate the probable cause of the error
- it should suggest a solution, a way to improve

Ideally, instructors should play an integral role in the service function. Each student should be assigned an instructor, and encouraged to contact him or her as often as necessary. Tests should be graded and returned with extensive comments in a personal letter from the instructor. The comments themselves should be positive and encouraging, focusing on specific errors, clarifying any concepts the student missed.

This is neither as difficult nor as expensive as it might seem. An analysis of student work in any field quickly shows that very few

students ever invent a new error. This means it is eminently possible to predict errors and develop pre-written comments and suggestions.

The Modern Personal Computer: Blessing or Curse?

In NHSC *Occasional Paper Number 1*, Michael P. Lambert indicated that modern technology applied to home study education might indeed be a curse. He explained that desktop publishing often resulted in poorly designed lessons, and that automating student records produced cold and impersonal student service letters.

One wonders, of course, if lessons were really better designed by virtue of being drafted on typewriters. One wonders if letters were clearer and warmer when we wrote them by hand, or pecked them out on an upright Underwood. What this really amounts to is a nostalgic look at the real or imagined achievements of a by-gone era.

It's much like the old-time carpenter criticizing slipshod modern work and blaming it on the use of power tools. In the hands of a skilled carpenter, power tools improve both productivity and the quality of work. (Actually, they even improve the work of an amateur, although not to the point where it competes with master craftsmen.)

The lesson to be learned here is that power tools are not a substitute for experience or skill. A power saw does not make a carpenter, a word processing program does not make a writer, and a desktop publishing program does not make a graphics layout artist. But each of these "power tools" does make the skillful educator much more productive with a lot less effort.

What, then is the best use of technology in home study education? Most of us think of computers as a good way to keep records and count money. Bean counters love them because they can monitor accounting records accurately and take the pulse of business activities faster than they have ever been able to do before. A lot of home study educators have come to understand that they are useful for

keeping student records. But very few have recognized or used them to their full capacity for providing instructive feedback.

Among the few that have, most have delegated this function to their data processing people without involving the educators. As a result, the feedback reads more like a dull, sterile, management report than an encouraging, instructive letter. As I said, most of us are using computers for their cost-effectiveness, not for their usefulness in providing instruction.

Meanwhile, the power and speed of the modern personal computer has increased exponentially over the last ten years. In just a decade, the memory capacity of the average PC has increased an astonishing 4000 percent (from 16K to 640K). Processing speed has kept pace, while costs have plummeted. Today, you can buy a personal computer that will rival the power of a corporate computer system of just ten years ago for less than the cost of a first-class electric typewriter.

Admittedly, the first personal computers did not live up to their promise of being "user-friendly." Today, however, application programs are much simpler and easier to use, easier than they were as recently as two or three years ago. Indeed, the rapid increase in the power of computers has outstripped the ability of programmers to develop application software for them. Nevertheless, modern software applications are so powerful that few people use even a tenth of their capacity.

Early users recognized the advantage of combining a database function with word processing, especially in creating boiler-plate letters to be sent to a large list of addresses. (If you have ever written your Congressman, you probably received one of these letters in reply.)

Simply stated, these two applications work with "if/then" statements. If Jones is a male, then the salutation in his letter reads "Dear Mr. Jones." If Jones is a married female, then it reads "Dear Mrs. Jones." If Hap E. Student scores 100, then we can say "Your score was perfect."

Close Up and Personal

Of course the computer doesn't care what we tell it to say, so if we use a little imagination and creativity, we can say:

> Dear Hap:
>
> I just finished going over your exam and I'm happy to report you had a perfect score. This is quite an improvement over your last score. (If it was.) Congratulations on a job well done. Give yourself a pat on the back.

With a little thought, a personal computer, a good word processing program, and a student records database, it is very easy to assemble prewritten comments and suggestions into a feedback letter. Such a document can be customized to such a degree that students are totally unaware that what they are getting is not, in fact, a personal letter written or dictated specifically for them.

Think of it as writing to an important and deserving customer -- and students are important and deserving customers. One of the most obvious things to do is address them by their first name. Thanking them for the lesson submission and providing an appropriate compliment about their score shows you recognize and care about their achievement.

When it is warranted, commenting on the fact that they have bettered their previous grade, or that their score is above the course average, helps them overcome the lack of peer interaction, competition, and support common in their previous learning experiences. Responding to errors by pointing out that other students have had the same problem builds self-esteem and reduces the difficulties inherent in studying alone.

Other remarks that acknowledge progress -- commenting on how long it's been since their last submission, reminding them how close they are to finishing, or congratulating them on their average -- tell students they are individuals being monitored by a caring faculty. Appropriate holiday greetings -- even birthday greetings, if a student's paper arrives at the right time -- add warmth to the response. Finally, every letter should end by asking for another submission.

Try to modify the language for each letter, though. Lead and closing paragraphs especially should vary for every lesson. Unless such a system is done well, students soon recognize they are reading boilerplate letters.

All this data, and more, is (or should be) part of any school's permanent records, and can easily be stored so it is readily accessible for incorporation into an assembled letter of this sort.

It is as important to give as much attention to these communications as we do to our lesson materials. I well remember visiting one school which was justifiably proud of the fact that, by rigorous editing and rewriting, they had reduced the reading level of their course materials to eighth grade -- a worthwhile endeavor. Unfortunately, no one had thought to apply the same principle to the college-level explanations and commentaries sent back with corrected exams.

Admittedly, it takes time and money to develop this kind of service. But it is well worth it in terms of student satisfaction, loyalty, and course completions. I continue to be puzzled by schools which bestow sizable budgets on their marketing department, and meager resources for student service activities. It is much more profitable and cost effective to keep an old customer than to recruit a new one, but many schools give little thought to keeping existing students happy and contented. Given the cancellation and refund policies with which we have to live, it makes sense that an exam results letter should receive at least as much attention as a follow-up marketing letter.

Let's not forget the instructors' role in a system based on automated instructional feedback. First, we free up the instructor from what can quickly become a boring, mechanical task. Indeed, this is probably one of the reasons we have tried to automate.

Second, we allow instructors to quickly answer, within the body of the exam results letter, any technical questions the student may have in a much more timely manner. In fact, we probably can count on such questions being answered more thoroughly.

Third, we free up instructors to handle phone calls and other correspondence. In effect, we increase our instructors' capacity for effective response and allow them to live up to the promise of home study education: personal, individualized attention and instruction, without a corresponding increase in costs.

Blessing or curse? I myself am convinced the modern personal computer is a blessing. In fact, I am convinced that, if we can master this technology, we can take a giant step forward in increasing the acceptance of home study education. A cursory review of consumer trends tells us that our students want convenience, service, and quality in everything they buy. We know we can deliver convenient education. Now we must work at delivering quality and service. With the help of the personal computer, we can do this. All we have to do is learn to use it imaginatively.

Test Results and Test Design

Let's look at some more computer applications in home study education. What is every bit as disappointing as the lack of good feedback is the fact that many schools are missing a priceless opportunity to collect valuable educational data. Today's computers make this easy. But, while we have been quick to use computers to improve our record keeping, marketing efforts, and tuition collections, I have seen too little use of them to improve testing and instruction.

Given the right kind of data, exams and questions can be analyzed quickly and effectively for reliability, stability, consistency, and equivalence. The degree of validity is the single most important aspect of a test, say William A. Mehrens and Irvin J. Lechmann (*Measurement and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, Third Edition). Modern personal computers are more than capable of performing every task needed to compile, sort, and analyze this important information. Yet only once have I seen test results collected and used for a test item analysis.

The software we use to grade and post student submissions also allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of our testing, via a test-item analysis sub-routine. Examinations can be evaluated on an on-going basis, and questions and course content amended whenever necessary.

Correctly applied, we can even take our back-tracings one step further and use this test data to evaluate the content of our course material and curriculum. If psychologists can reliably test subjective personality traits with objective examinations, surely we can learn if our tests are measuring and emphasizing what we intended, and whether our courses are working.

Testing Formats

There are several formats that are appropriate for testing in a home study environment -- the most familiar are essay exams, multiple choice exams, and true-false exams. Most, by the very nature of home study, are open-book exams. Some are better at testing a student's mastery of certain subjects than others, but they have all been used somewhere, with varying degrees of success. Regardless of the type, any home study examination should have a threefold purpose:

- encourage students to review
- enable students to monitor their comprehension of the material
- reinforce the learning objectives of a lesson or group of lessons.

Measured by these goals, each type of testing has its strengths and weaknesses.

The Essay Examination

In NHSC *Occasional Paper Number 1*, Michael P. Lambert suggested that most of us are slaves to multiple choice questions, and urged the use of essay questions or examinations in their place. Good essay tests can provide good learning experiences, and they remain popular

with many educators. With some subjects -- writing and composition are the best examples -- they might be the only practical method of testing.

Essay questions are certainly easier to prepare than good objective tests. But the main reason they persist is because many educators are unaware of their limitations, of which there are several. Among them are:

- limited content sampling
- scorer unreliability
- poor predictive validity
- high scoring costs

Perhaps the most serious of these limitations is limited content sampling, especially in the extended response type of essay. Regardless of the thoroughness with which an essay test is constructed, you cannot sample course content as well with, say, two lengthy essay questions as you can with 20 multiple-choice questions.

Variations in the reliability of individual scorers leads to irregularities in grading (although these can sometimes be minimized by careful construction of the questions, and by setting up specified procedures). Essay tests must be scored by competent professionals. Even then, however, the score often depends as much on who reads the paper as on the quality of the answer. This is compounded by the fact that often the student does not understand a question, and therefore is not sure how to respond. As a result, scores on essay exams usually do not reflect student achievement as accurately as other testing modes. It also takes an inordinate amount of time to read and grade an essay answer. As a result, costs, and consequently our charges, become considerably higher.

Finally, it takes more time to answer essay questions, and students view them as the most challenging exam format. If we accept the indications of a disposition toward convenience as embodied in the consumer marketing surveys I mentioned earlier, essay examinations seem contrary to our students' desires. Recognizing that too many students are already skeptical of home study as an educational deliv-

ery system, I question the wisdom of using them. From either an academic or an economic point of view, there are better formats for testing.

True-False Tests

The most common alternatives to essay exams are true-false and multiple choice tests. Either one is more objective than the essay test. Both offer the advantage of familiarity -- after all, most of our students have been taking them since their earliest school days. Furthermore, both are cost-effective, since they can be scored quickly, accurately, and objectively by clerical personnel or scoring machines.

Carefully constructed true-false questions can measure the higher mental processes -- understanding, application, and interpretation. They are particularly suitable for testing attitudes and beliefs, but they can be adapted to most content areas (although they work best in testing elementary subjects).

True-false tests do have the advantage of making it possible to ask a lot of questions on a larger amount of material in a limited amount of time. A student can answer about three true-false items for every two multiple-choice items. (Essay questions are less efficient by far.) True-false tests generally provide high reliability per unit of testing time, but this has to be interpreted carefully. It does not mean that true-false tests are the most reliable overall. On the contrary, on an item-by-item basis, they tend to be least reliable, because they are more susceptible to ambiguity and misinterpretation.

Simply put, there are many instances when statements are not unequivocally true or false. Rather, there are degrees of correctness. For example, the boiling point of water depends on atmospheric pressure. Therefore the statement "water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit" is only true at sea level. Thus true-false tests tend to be less discriminating, item for item, than multiple-choice tests. (It has been said that you need 2.5 to 4.5 times as many true-false questions as multiple-choice questions to get equivalent reliability.)

Because of the phenomenon of degree of correctness, good true-false questions are difficult to write. They often require qualifiers, which in themselves provide clues to the correct answer. Specific determiners (clues like "always" or "never") are more prevalent in true-false items than in any other objective-item format, because the question writer is struggling to come up with a statement that is completely true or completely false. This single factor should preclude their use in open-book testing.

True-false tests are also susceptible to an "acquiescence response set" -- students tend to develop a pattern of responding almost automatically (usually "true"), without giving the item any real thought. Since they are so susceptible to ambiguity, I would avoid them. Adult learners hate to fail, and they really resent ambiguous questions. The multiple choice exam is a much better choice.

Multiple Choice Examinations

Multiple-choice tests, consisting of questions in the form of a stem and four or five options (the correct answer along with distractors, or incorrect alternatives) have many advantages. The greatest of these is perhaps their versatility: multiple-choice questions can measure factual recall, as well as the students' ability to reason, exercise judgment, and express themselves correctly and effectively. Students find them less ambiguous, and generally prefer them over true-false exams. They also can be scored quickly, accurately, and inexpensively.

Multiple-choice tests are relatively efficient to administer. True-false questions are slightly more so, both in terms of the number of questions that can be asked in a given amount of time, and in terms of the space needed to present them. But multiple-choice tests usually provide greater per-item reliability.

Of all selection-type objective tests, multiple-choice tests are the most independent from response sets such as the tendency to give a different answer when the same content is presented in a different form. The difficulty of a multiple-choice test can be controlled by the selection of responses, especially distractors. The closer the

responses are in their degree of correctness the more difficult the test. Thus, they can be very useful in designing mastery type exams.

Compared to true-false questions, multiple-choice questions have a relatively small susceptibility to variations in score due to guessing, because the probability of guessing correctly depends on the number of options. For a three-option item, the chances are 1 in 3; for a five-option item, the chances of guessing the correct answer are 1 in 5.

Multiple-choice testing has some disadvantages. Good multiple-choice questions are difficult to write; there is a tendency to write items that demand only factual recall, and it is often hard to think of plausible distractors. (A multiple-choice item with only one plausible distractor has a guessing factor similar to that in true-false testing.)

Of all the selection-type objective tests, the multiple-choice test requires the most time to take, especially when very fine discriminations have to be made. Measuring factual information generally shows less time-to-respond variability than measuring comprehension, but the time ratio depends on the content as well as on the difficulty/comprehension factor of the question.

Still, if one looks carefully and objectively at home study education, it is clear that the multiple choice format serves our needs best. Multiple-choice tests can be graded quickly and economically. They can measure almost any learning or behavioral objective. They can objectively test a student's ability to reason and exercise judgment, an important item in home study education since most of us depend on open-book testing.

Open-Book Testing

Open-book testing is often misunderstood by traditional educators. Many do not believe it is real testing at all. But it's important not to confuse this type of testing with the quizzes given in traditional education.

Open-book testing is used to:

- stimulate review
- reinforce learning objectives
- communicate goals
- furnish feedback on misunderstood material
- separate those who have reached a specific set of objectives from those who have not

Good open-book questions should require students to review the material once again. In a way, they can be thought of as context-dependent. If they are properly prepared, students have to demonstrate their ability to extrapolate and infer key concepts from a given body of material, rather than simply find an answer in the text and parrot it back. Thus the emphasis is on repetition and inference, as students review the text in an effort to recognize, understand, synthesize, and select appropriate responses. Questions that can be answered on the basis of rote memory should be kept to a minimum. Students can simply "cram" to prepare for such testing and little, if any, learning actually takes place.

The results of open-book testing must be interpreted cautiously. If a student fails the test, the fault may be in the instructional material, in the test items, or in the standard of mastery or minimum competency that has been set.

An Obvious Preference

From this overview of different means of testing, you can see that I lean strongly toward multiple-choice, open-book testing for most home study applications. It must, of course, be based on well-constructed questions, and the information, instruction, and reinforcement you provide the student after testing must be delivered in an effective format.

Here is a check-list summary of key objectives to achieve:

____ Questions must cover all the course or lesson objectives.

____ Questions and distractors should induce the student to review the text, and to extrapolate the information that represents the correct, or best, answer.

____ Students' answers should come to you in a format you can process rapidly and efficiently.

____ Feedback on testing should go to the student in the form of a personalized letter.

____ You should have specific comments prepared to send back for each incorrect answer the student chooses.

____ These comments should identify errors (and sometimes, the degree of error); they should postulate the cause of error, suggest the solution or path to improvement, and clarify the concept or concepts covered.

____ The comment letter should be encouraging in tone and content; it should be written at an appropriate grade level for your lessons; it should acknowledge achievement and motivate students to persevere and improve; and it should address them in a natural way, with personal touches you can glean from your records.

Finally, whatever mode of testing is chosen, considerable attention should be given to orienting the student to how it works. You want to measure your students' understanding of the material, not their test-taking expertise or abilities. If you don't prepare them, if you don't help them understand how the test works and what they are expected to do, then, no matter how well it is constructed, your testing will fail. Your testing -- not the student.

Toward Better Testing and Teaching

Preparing good testing and appropriate feedback is at least as time-consuming as preparing the lesson material itself. In preparing the feedback for a recently accredited course, we actually generated more copy in constructing the feedback than we did in the text. If you have never used a computer, you'll find automating effective and meaningful feedback a time-consuming and challenging task.

What's more, it takes a lot of people with special skills. Experienced instructors to help anticipate every possible action of the student. Skillful writers to prepare meaningful and warm responses. Course editors and subject specialists to help explain concepts in a different language from the text, and to give suggestions for improvement. Ordinarily, we try to lower the reading level of our responses to mistakes since it is obvious that the discussion in the text eluded the student. Finally, you need computer programmers to help with the database functions and the generation of the exam results letter.

Perhaps the most challenging task is to find good test writers. It has been our experience that subject specialists and course writers are often very poor at this. We have gotten our best results by selecting people who have some skills and experience in test writing and giving them a list of the objectives. We have also learned from experience to start working on exams and responses simultaneously with the development of the text.

Not only do you want well-prepared responses, but you want to ensure that they are in the students' hands as soon as possible. At some point, everyone involved in administering exams is brought in to review the full testing-and-feedback cycle: mail room personnel, clerks, data processing personnel -- even the people who stuff the returned envelope. At GIA, we recently brought in our U.S. Postal Service representative who showed us how to address envelopes so our students would get their responses a day earlier.

And, with all this effort, we still have problems. Students still complain, and we encounter problems we never anticipated. We have to monitor our service constantly. We are perpetually revising our course content, exams, feedback, and service. It never seems good enough. But then, who among us has ever prepared a perfect course?

Sample Letter to Student

March 30, 1990

Thomas Kowl
29 Primrose Lane
Lowell, MI 48221

Dear Thomas:

It's been a while since I've heard from you. But it's good to see you're still moving along in the course and have completed Assignment 4.

And I'm delighted to see you did even better on this one. You got 94%. The average score on this questionnaire is 88%. Great work!

Let's take a moment to go over what you missed.

For question 4 you selected D. You probably remembered that indirect denial is the most common technique for overcoming objectives, but it isn't the one used here. An indirect denial statement here might be, "Yes, I used to think some department stores carried the same products we do. But I found out their selection is pretty small." The best answer here is C, compensation. The compensating advantages offered are a larger selection and added services. See page 6.

I hope that is some help to you. Make sure you check back with the text so you understand the concepts behind the questions.

You really are learning the techniques and philosophies set out in the course, Thomas. I'm happy with your work so far, and I hope this understanding is already bringing you bigger sales!

I look forward to hearing from you soon. I'll especially be watching for the last questionnaire. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Student

March 30, 1990

Nancy Addy
4502 Greening Road
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Nancy,

This is the kind of dedication I like to see. Your answer sheet for Assignment 2 got here just a week ago, and now you've finished Assignment 4!

This one was a little tougher than the last two, wasn't it? but you still came through with a 80%!

Because this one was more difficult for you, go over my comments here carefully. I want to be sure you really understand this assignment before you go on.

For question 1 you chose C. I might have been tempted by this one. True, many times more information will be necessary to overcome an objective -- but not always. Remember, the best method is to lead the customer into removing the objection. You start the process by applying the steps of active listening, including acknowledging that the objection is a valid concern, answer D. See page 5.

For question 9 you chose C. Yes, symbolism does play a role in buying decisions. Diamonds are traditional symbols of love, and this is important to many customers. But it rarely affects a customer choosing between two pieces. Explaining the rarity of gems, the cost of metals, and the creativity and skill involved in manufacture is a good way to help customers choose the higher-quality, higher-price piece, answer B. See page 4.

For question 10 you selected B. Since you understand that reassuring the customer is one of the goals of active listening, I've added some points to your score. But naming the feeling alone will not make the customer feel better. You must build empathy and trust to reassure them. Naming the feeling confirms it for you and the customer. After it is tangible you can deal with it, answer D. See page 5, Assignment 3.

March 30, 1990
Nancy Addy
Page 2

I hope these comments are useful, Nancy, Make sure you check back in the text so you understand the concepts behind the questions you missed.

Also, if you haven't done so already, start putting your new skills and information to work. This isn't a theoretical exercise -- everything in the course has practical applications.

And don't waste any time in getting through the last two assignments. Speed will get you to the final while everything is still fresh in your mind.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. I'll especially be watching for the last questionnaire. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Student

March 30, 1990

Robert Hardee
35 South Monroe Street
Washougal, WA 98857

Dear Robert,

I'm glad to hear from you! It's been about three weeks since you enrolled in Fine Jewelry Sales, but I haven't gotten your Personality Profile yet. Did you send it in? If so, give me a call so I can trace it at this end. If not, you should take the profile test today. It is provided for your benefit, no ours, and the sooner you get your results, the quicker you can start applying them in your work.

The time you invested in studying has paid off. You got a perfect score! Congratulations! The average score on this questionnaire is 90%.

Now that you've really gotten started (and are doing so well), let me encourage you to finish your assignments regularly. I know your studies compete with other things in your life: family, work, hobbies. But this course is packed with a lot of information that can really change the way you work -- for the better. I'd like to see you enjoying those benefits as soon as possible.

A keen interest and a commitment to really work at this are the key to succeeding. If you give it your best, it will pay off in more and better sales.

Keep up the good work -- and keep those assignments coming! I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Sincerely,

About the Author

Dennis Foltz has worked for Gemological Institute of America for 14 years. He earned his Graduate Gemologist diploma via GIA's home study program, and joined the staff in 1976. He has been an instructor of resident programs and also served as Director of Technical Personnel before becoming the Manager of the Home Study Department. Today, as GIA's Director of Operations, Dennis continues to oversee course developoment and home study along with his wider administrative responsibilities.

During his tenure at GIA, Dennis is responsible for completing major revisions of the institute's core courses in Diamonds, Diamond Grading, Colored Stones, Gem Identification, and Colored Stone Grading, as well as developing new courses. He developed GIA's Doorstep Program, taking test equipment and home study instructors to cities in the U.S. and abroad, to help home study students complete their practical work and take their exams.

His work in the area of course development has made him a sought-after speaker and consultant in the developing, marketing, and servicing of home study courses. He is one of the authors of NHSC's *Home Study Course Development Handbook* and has written several articles for other NHSC publications.

A long-time supporter of the National Home Study Council and its policies, he has testified before Congresional Committees on proposed legislation affecting home study schools. He has also served on numerous NHSC accreditation committees, and has generously shared his expertise, both formally and informally, with other NHSC schools. In 1988, Dennis received the first NHSC *Distinguished Recognition Award* for his outstanding contributions to home study education.

NATIONAL HOME STUDY COUNCIL

1601 18TH STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009
(202) 234-5100